



DESIGN
IMPACT

METATHEMES:

Designing for Equitable Social Change

JANUARY 2017

Overcome transportation
and distance barriers
to get teens the food

needed in the summertime?

UBER

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INTRODUCTION

Design Impact is humbled to share this report with our broader community of social changemakers. The work included here represents our vision for the deep equity work that is needed in today's divisive and fragmented climate. We hope it inspires community leaders to reconsider and redesign the structure of social systems and services.

As a nonprofit social innovation firm, we have been deeply and directly connected to community voice on complex problems such as food access, homelessness, employment, health and education. In our ongoing efforts to amplify citizen input, we have identified a set of “metathemes” that have emerged across multiple issues and communities.

The metathemes identified in this report offer clear implications for a new path forward. **While each metatheme includes compelling questions to solve, specific calls to action emerged for all who are working to create equitable change. They are represented in the following page.** Whether we are philanthropists, nonprofit leaders, government officials, community members, or front-line workers, we hope this call to action will hold us all accountable to ourselves, each other, and our communities.

These metathemes offer clear implications for a new path forward and a **call to action** for all of us working to create equity.

Equity in Practice: Calls to Action

LOOK INTO THE MIRROR.

In order to rise above status quo, we have to start with ourselves to understand our role in structures of power and oppression. We recognize this is an ongoing growth process that requires constant attention and an ability to reflect on our individual and collective beliefs and actions.

EMBRACE OUR COMPLEXITY.

We occupy multiple identities that lead to varied lived experiences and relationships to power. A woman can experience privilege in her whiteness and discrimination in her gender; privilege in her religion and discrimination in her class. In other words, our identities are complex and intersectional. We must recognize this in ourselves and in others so that we can empathize and connect in order to create change together.

CHALLENGE OUR OWN BIASES AND REFUSE TO PASS THEM DOWN.

We know that we all carry biases towards other groups, but we must refuse to pass on these stereotypes to our next generation.

RECOGNIZE RACISM + SEXISM.

We can't get at the root of inequity without addressing this nation's long history with racism and sexism. We must break the silence, have the courage to name it when we see it and design new systems to create equity.

ACKNOWLEDGE OUR INTERVENTIONS CAN BOTH HELP AND HURT.

We understand the role our systems play in institutionalized oppression and the impact of that on communities. We cannot be afraid to redesign our own frameworks—whether that be different funding structures, providing childcare, adjusting meeting times and locations, consolidating services and/or putting resources toward sustained community leadership development.

WORK ACROSS DIFFERENCE.

We are all part of the problem and all part of the solution. Because we all hold privilege and marginalized identities, we can't work alone to solve complex problems in society. For example, we can't address concentrated poverty without addressing concentrated wealth. All parties need to be at the table.



FLIP THE POWER.

We believe that communities, not organizations, should ultimately hold the power to create change. Organizations must be willing to relinquish power. Let's go beyond feedback to create space to solve with others, not for others, encouraging full access to power for all.

LEARN TOGETHER.

We understand that given the complexity of our systems, we cannot know all the answers. We must say when we don't know and invite others to help us figure it out.

CREATE SPACE FOR PAIN.

We know our histories carry pain and are a defining factor in shaping our

present and our future. Without holding space to heal, we can't move forward

GET OUT OF THE BOX.

We believe all people are creative, and creativity is key to seizing opportunities and moving past problems. There are intentional tools to drive divergence into our work. Let's discover and practice them.

VALUE PEOPLE OVER PAPERWORK.

While we understand the deep value of quantitative data and predictive metrics, it must be balanced with a focus on the power of the human story and individual experience. We believe that relationships and people matter most and our actions should reflect that.

SEE EACH OTHER, PUSH EACH OTHER.

We recognize that we all have different values and norms. We also recognize the need to challenge the norms that hold us back from realizing our own potential. We must build relationships and seek critical feedback to learn from each other, grow and ultimately change.

BE TRANSPARENT AND CIRCLE BACK IMMEDIATELY.

We believe that we are all responsible for taking care of each other and deserve to know the agenda when it comes to community change. As a community, we are responsible for sharing progress and outcomes with those who have played a part and shaped any element of the change efforts.

BUILD TRUST. STICK AROUND.

Ask ourselves: “Are we a reliable and constant presence in the lives of those we serve? Are our interactions predictable and consistent? Can others count on us to show up and stay connected? Do we backup our promises with action?” This is how we build trust.

Whether we are philanthropists, nonprofit leaders, government officials, community members, or front-line workers, we hope this **call to action will hold us all accountable to ourselves, each other, and our communities.**

BACKGROUND

Over the course of all of our work in the social sector, Design Impact (DI) has worked on over thirty projects that directly relate to poverty and inequity in the Greater Cincinnati region. All of these projects began by deeply listening to the voice of community members—as well as frontline workers, funders and policy makers—and then capturing how these individuals articulate their experiences with various social sector areas, ranging from employment to education to health care. These listening sessions were boiled down into key insights, or deep intuitive learnings, for each project.

While each project looked at separate social problems, **the Design Impact team began to see patterns in the insights we were collecting.** The team felt an increasing need to understand the “metathemes”, or opportunities for social change that cut across siloed sectors and segregated neighborhoods and offer suggestions for human-centered approaches that aim for structural change. Such powerful work has been done in our region using largely quantitative data.

There is also value in qualitative data that incorporates community voice in that it helps us:

- **Reframe or better define a problem**
- **Explore new theories or approaches to a challenge**
- **Uncover existing mental models or meanings that guide behavior**

Design Impact saw the creation of metathemes as an opportunity to amplify community voice in our current efforts around poverty and equity, both regionally and nationally.

At the same time, United Way of Greater Cincinnati became interested in developing a more integrated approach to their funding strategies to maximize resources, reduce system inefficiency and most importantly, move families out of poverty. Both Design Impact and United Way felt that it would be greatly beneficial to go back through Design Impact’s community-driven insights to uncover these metathemes, revealing a more nuanced understanding of structural inequality and offering a more transformational framework in solving those inequities.

This report details the metathemes that we uncovered. These metathemes are evolving, so that while we start with six, **we expect each to be revisited, refined and reimaged by others seeking to drive equity and innovation in the social sector.** Essentially, we hope this is the beginning of a new kind of dialogue for change-makers in the social sector. We expect community members and frontline workers to be at the center of this dialogue.

PROCESS

To inform our metathemes work, DI started with over thirty projects from areas including education, health and wellness, food access, workforce development, government innovation, community development, arts and culture, homelessness and literacy. Human-centered design (HCD) provides a practical model for how to operationalize learnings into actionable next steps to create equity. While we tap into many change-oriented practices to meet the specific needs of our partners, HCD is the key foundational practice that DI applies to all projects.

These projects focused on diverse populations including African-Americans, women, teens (rural, suburban, urban), Latino immigrants, children (ages 8 - 12 yrs), students (high school), low-income adults, parents and caregivers. Populations less represented include Appalachians, whites, middle and upper class adults and members of the LGBTQ community.

Design Impact employed a rigorous process to uncover these metathemes, grounded in human-centered design and intersectionality. For more on our research methodology, please see **Appendix A**.

Design Impact saw the creation of metathemes as an opportunity to amplify community voice in our current efforts around poverty and equity, both regionally and nationally.

FRAMEWORK FOR EACH METATHEME

What is a metatheme?

Metathemes are brief statements that reflect the meaning behind a set of similar insights, learnings or data points. Design Impact’s metathemes are a ‘theming of those themes’ from several projects that each represent a different sector. Each metatheme included in this report is supported by the following components:

Source of Tension is the contrasting or conflicting part of a problem that makes it an important challenge.

Motivation is why the ‘Source of Tension’ matters to people and/or systems. These motivations are important because they are what must be activated, triggered or not disrupted moving forward.

Opportunities are challenges that help us start to think about how to activate a metatheme.

Call to Action is a series of unifying principles that represent the culmination of all of our community-driven work at Design Impact. The purpose of these calls to action are to guide social changemakers on how a service or program should operate in order to be both creative and inclusive of all voices.

Stories from the Field are vignettes and other examples based on the lived experiences of community members. These are comprised of insights, cases and mini-stories in order to communicate how the metatheme plays out in real life.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Questions to reflect on as you read this report:

- How does this metatheme show up in the work I do?
- What changes might I make as a leader?
- How might I implement a call to action at my organization?

SOCIAL SECTORS REPRESENTED

Design Impact intentionally pulled from diverse project areas—from arts and culture to government innovation, in order to represent a cross-section of learnings.



Arts + Culture



Community Development



Education



Food Access



Government Innovation



Health + Wellness



Homelessness



Literacy



Safety



Workforce Development

METATHEMES

The six metathemes outlines in this report include:

1. BRIDGE NORMS

Value me for who I am, not who I'm told to be. Challenge me to grow.

2. GO BEYOND FEEDBACK

Move from community voice to community leadership.

3. FEED MY SOUL

Tap into my passion, tap into my power.

4. REDESIGN THE SYSTEM

Decrease system complexity to increase engagement and dignity.

5. GIVE ROOM TO HEAL

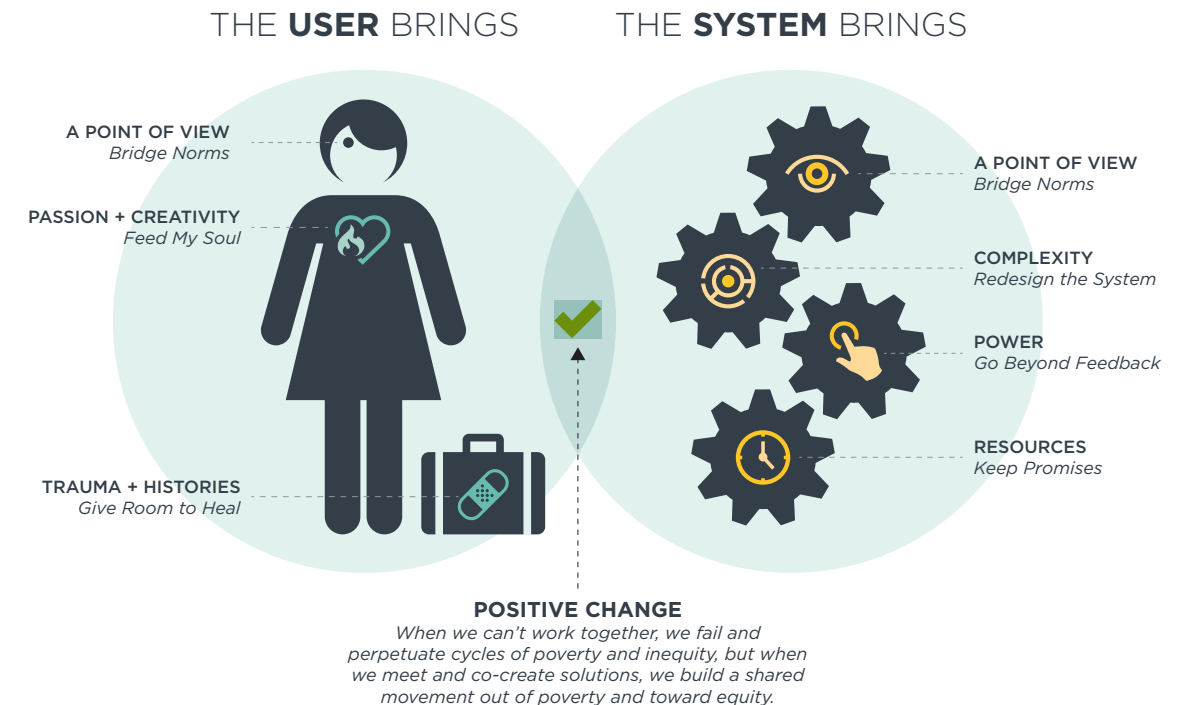
Consider my whole self, including my trauma and history.

6. KEEP PROMISES

Show up every time. Deliver on your word.

THE KEYS TO POSITIVE CHANGE

In the following pages, as you read the analysis of each metatheme, keep in mind that they do not stand alone. Rather, they are in dynamic interplay with one another. This infographic represents the relationships between the metathemes, highlighting the implications of how we should work in our communities.



META THEMES

BRIDGE NORMS

Value me for who I am,
not who I'm told to be.
Challenge me to grow.



1. BRIDGE NORMS

Value me for who I am, not who I'm told to be. Challenge me to grow.

SOURCE OF TENSION

There is a need to value and meet people where they are in order to engage them. However, they are often expected to adopt dominant social norms in order to have access to dominant society and its resources.

For example, current social services are often designed and dominated by middle-class norms such as goal-setting, time management and “success.” Simultaneously, individuals often experience strong family, cultural and social norms that run counter to existing social service expectations. Trying new things is often discouraged by community peers and family.

MOTIVATION

- **On a human level:** I need to feel valued and validated in wider society as I am and not as I am told to be.
- **On a systems level:** Laws/policies demand that people follow rules and norms that might be new to them in order to access resources.

OPPORTUNITIES

- *How might we expand our definition of what’s “normal” to create inclusive programs and access to resources?*
- *How might we design a future where diversity and prosperity are the norm rather than segregation and poverty?*
- *How might we ensure that inclusive community drive all responses—from problem framing, to identification of solutions, to implementation, to evaluation?*
- *How might we engage community groups on both sides of an issue as allies in challenging the dominant norms that inhibit the prosperity of all in our community?*
- *How might we hold all of us (across racial, gender, class or citizenship lines) accountable as part of the problem and the solution?*

CALL TO ACTION

Work across difference. We are all part of the problem and all part of the solution. Because we all hold privilege and marginalized identities, we can’t work alone to solve complex problems in society. For example, we can’t address concentrated poverty without addressing concentrated wealth. All parties need to be at the table.

See each other, push each other. We recognize that we all have different values and norms. We also recognize the need to challenge the norms that hold us back from realizing our own potential. We must build relationships and seek critical feedback to learn from each other, grow and ultimately change.

“When a crab is trying to crawl out of a bucket, other crabs will pull them down. We have staff that grew up in poverty. When they went to college, their friends said, ‘What’s wrong with you? Why do you think you’re special?’

Stories from the Field



SPILLED MILK

Katrice is a junior at a public high school in the city. She has lots of responsibilities. Her mother just picked up a second shift, but the family still struggles. It's now up to Katrice to get her two younger brothers ready for school in the morning. After they're on the bus, she takes a separate bus to high school. Some evenings, her mother works late, and so she helps her brothers with homework and puts them to bed. She even stays up late to do homework because she wants to do well in school, but her brothers tease her for this telling her she's trying to be something she's not.

Ms. Cook is Katrice's math teacher. She cares about her students doing well. She has noticed that lately



Katrice is falling asleep in class and her grades are slipping. She also saw multiple cartons of milk taken from the lunchroom, hidden in Katrice's bookbag one Friday. Ms. Cook is concerned but doesn't want to pry because she knows if she learns certain things about Katrice and her living situation, she is mandated to report them to the authorities.

Ms. Cook explains to Katrice that she might be able to get a pack of free food for the weekend. Katrice feels ashamed that someone has noticed. She responds quickly that everything is fine. Katrice thinks about how hard her mother has been working lately and worries that if people really knew what was going on at home, the family would be split up.

OTHER EXAMPLES

- Mike loves being a dad and being there for his kids. He often takes them to the doctor—for both check-ups and for emergency visits. Everytime he shows up with them at the health clinic, he is met with question and suspicion. They have to call his children's mother to confirm that he's an approved caregiver. He feels insulted and honestly, wonders if it has to do with the fact he's a black man. Why can't he be treated with respect when he's simply trying to be a good dad?
- Guatemalan families in Price Hill often do not get the message about the importance of preschool. They don't understand the value in sending their children to preschool since it's not always offered in the rural areas of Guatemala. Language barriers also make this process difficult. Some Guatemalan families speak Spanish as a second language, their first language being a native dialect, so they start learning Spanish upon their arrival to the US. The fact that most campaigns/advocates speak English makes it even harder for them to fully explore this educational opportunity for their children.
- **What's working: Example 1** A group of local community citizens started working on issues around police accountability following the 2001 racial riots that followed the police killing of an unarmed black man. They wanted a more proactive, preventive approach to solving community problems by engaging local citizens. Through surveys, knocking on doors, jumping on buses and walking around the community, they simply asked youth what they wanted and as a result, determined that hip hop culture was an opportunity to engage local youth that weren't otherwise involved in other community-based initiatives. The result was the opening of a youth center focused on youth leadership and community-building through Hip Hop music, dance and art.
- **What's working: Example 2** In efforts to create sexual violence prevention initiatives, an agency learns that they need to go beyond redefining masculinity and its role in gender violence. Engaging the LGBTQ community, they learned that the messages that resonate with straight men can't be assumed to work with all queer men. This understanding informs more effective prevention efforts.

GO BEYOND FEEDBACK

Move from community voice
to community leadership.



2. GO BEYOND FEEDBACK

Move from community voice to community leadership.

SOURCE OF TENSION

Current philanthropic and service models are designed for top-down decision-making. These models sometimes ask for feedback or even ideas and solutions, but community members and frontline workers, who have the deepest experiences with these issues, rarely sit in positions of power. When we only ask for feedback and don't invite community as co-designers (with equal decision-making power), we can make the same situations we are solving for even worse. In short, community voice without community leadership is significantly less effective. To move away from tokenist actions that solely give the appearance of empowerment, we must go beyond feedback.

MOTIVATION

People want to feel like their voices matter. As individuals, we are proud of our self-reliance; we have a strong need/desire to be able to give, not just take.

OPPORTUNITIES

- *How might we build on the current models of engaging frontline worker and community voice (i.e. listening sessions, interviews, brainstorming ideas) to put these stakeholders in positions of power?*
- *How might we create a structure that invites bottom-up engagement in all decision-making and actions?*
- *How might we create programs where community members co-lead and implement solutions with their fellow citizens?*
- *How might we challenge the rules and practices of organizations to elevate community to positions of power?*
- *How might we as community members take responsibility to hold organization accountable.*



CALL TO ACTION

Flip the power. We believe that communities, not organizations, should ultimately hold the power to create change. Organizations must be willing to relinquish power. Let's go beyond feedback to create space to solve with others, not for others, encouraging full access to power for all.

Be transparent and circle back immediately. We believe that we are all responsible for taking care of each other and deserve to know the agenda when it comes to community change. As a community, we are responsible for sharing progress and outcomes with those who have played a part and shaped any element of the change efforts.

Stories from the Field

LOST IN THE SHUFFLE

Angie has lost faith. Her apartment building has been plagued by mold for months, and she feels that it's unsafe for her 2 and 4-year-old. She was happy when the neighborhood's community development corporation, led by Joan, asked her and some other residents to brainstorm solutions to the problem.

In the session, she shared her own experiences and provided input. She even brought other residents to the session. In the end, Angie wants to make things better for her children and her community. The session was five months ago, though, and there have been no changes. Angie doesn't understand why things fell through. She asked Joan what happened and what she could do to help.

Joan's been fighting to get feedback from residents as the community development corporation tried to work with Angie's landlords. She fought hard to get residents to show up to the community listening session, and was so happy to have people like Angie there. They offered really great feedback. But at the end of the day,

she's overwhelmed by her responsibilities and probably needed that community support, voice, movement and energy at meetings with her superiors where the real decisions are made. She presented client feedback at the development corporation's board meeting, but does not feel the board is fully supportive of the community's ideas and priorities. She feels she can only push so much as a subordinate. She feels pressure that people like Angie are depending on her to make change happen but she can't do it alone.

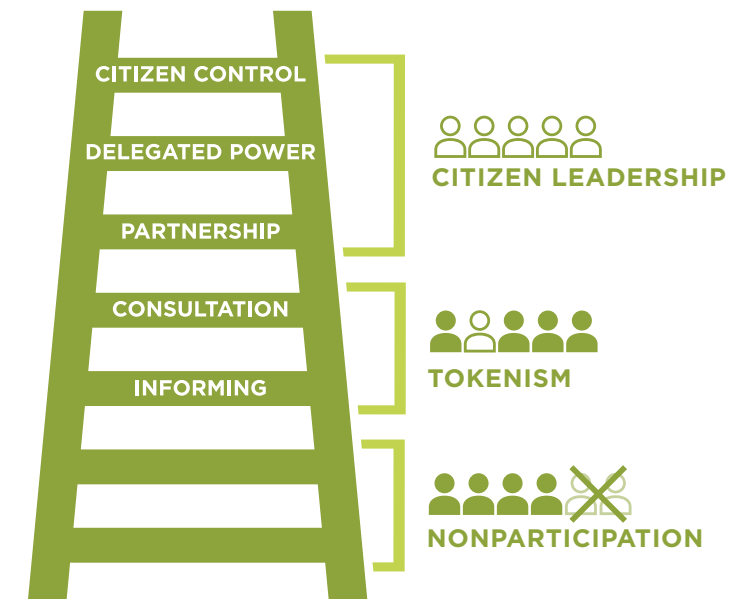
A large local funder is aware of the unsafe housing conditions in buildings like those Angie lives in—that's why it funds Joan's organization. They want to be responsive to community members like Angie and know that empowering community as co-designer requires a deep investment of time and resources. Currently, they are not setup to provide flexible and nimble funding, but hope in the future to offer capacity building and funding opportunities that reflect community needs.

OTHER EXAMPLES

- Students and teachers are asked for feedback on the curriculum but are not actively involved in designing improvements.
- Community members and front-line workers report "feedback fatigue"— they participate in multiple listening sessions but never see the results or outcomes.

LADDER OF ENGAGEMENT

Based on "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," originally published by Sherry R. Arnstein in 1969, this model represents various levels of citizen engagement.



FEED MY SOUL

Tap into my passion,
tap into my power.



3. FEED MY SOUL

Tap into my passion, tap into my power.

SOURCE OF TENSION

Self-expression is not just a nice-to-have (as Maslow’s hierarchy suggests), but is fundamental to healthy and active engagement. In addition to self-expression, when people feel they have choices around their future, motivation increases. Self-expression, autonomy and choice are necessary, catalytic tools for overcoming crisis, but we often treat them as low on the priority list.

MOTIVATION

Self-expression generates a sense of control and inspiration that we all need in order to feel powerful and capable of transforming our circumstances. Kids feel powerful through play and exploration that brings them a sense of joy; teens feel powerful through choice that brings them a sense of independence; adults feel powerful through spiritual healing, self-care and companionship that bring them a sense of control.

OPPORTUNITIES

- *How might we use self-expression to support people’s change efforts to transform their circumstances?*
- *How might we respond to trauma by tapping into people’s creativity?*
- *How might social service organizations create opportunity for choice and autonomy?*
- *How might we identify what feeds our souls?*

CALL TO ACTION

Get out of the box. We believe all people are creative, and creativity is key to seizing opportunities and moving past problems. There are intentional tools to drive divergence into our work. Let’s discover and practice them.



Stories from the Field

WHAT'S WORKING

Samantha is struggling to keep her head above water. There are so many people depending on her, and yet she feels all alone. She worries about her kids—their education, their safety and simply providing for them. Gunshots and police sirens keep her awake at night, fearful of the impact on her children. She takes solace in a small corner that she's created for herself—her prayer space—where she retreats for solitude and quiet. This space rejuvenates her and fills her with strength and hope as she faces each day.

Jay is a happy 7-year-old that loves to play. His neighborhood isn't safe, but his mom creatively makes sure he has things to occupy his mind and body. She bought him a PlayStation and toys he can play with in the hallway of their apartment. She and some other moms take turns watching their kids play in the front yard so that they have time outdoors. They choreograph dances and do gymnastics. When she's able to join him in being silly, she finds such joy. These moments lift her up.

A local initiative seeking to increase women's employment in Advanced Manufacturing learns that in order to support women in this career pathway, it is critical to also engage their children. They launch a family camp that exposes children to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math fields (STEM). The camp will give kids a chance to explore science and math in fun ways while also strategically educating their mothers on workforce opportunities, and ultimately recruit them for their program.



OTHER EXAMPLES

- Kids are a bridge to building relationships with disengaged parents. In many communities, residents' lifestyles and activities are highly influenced by their kids' interests; parents are much more likely to turn out if their kids want to participate.
- Once many teens reach a certain age, parents don't pay for all their needs, so they want to make money. They need choice. Teens are eager to work so they have choice.
- Teens eligible for free and reduced lunch express a need for choices in their food options and opportunities to learn new skills around cooking and food prep.



Everyone asks me about **my barriers**.
No one ever asks me about **my dreams**.

REDESIGN THE SYSTEM

Decrease system complexity
to increase engagement
and dignity.



4. REDESIGN THE SYSTEM

Decrease system complexity to increase engagement and dignity.

SOURCE OF TENSION

As system complexity increases, stakeholder engagement decreases. Large social influences (e.g. rapid policy changes and budget reallocations) and organizational-level influences (e.g. staff and leadership turnover, organizational policies and practices) position systems in a reactionary stance that can lead to a lack of coordination within and across organizations.

While there is a need to reduce complexity, consolidating services and programs can be threatening to service providers because it sets up competitive/territorial funding and service provision.

This tension translates to:

- **“Workarounds” developed by community members and frontline workers.** Often these lead to word-of-mouth navigation and false expectations.
- **Devalued relationship building.** An increasing pressure to drive engagement through measurements combined with an increasing number of clients leads to prioritizing paperwork over people work.

MOTIVATION

People want to be treated with respect and viewed as a whole person. For community members, it is demoralizing to ask for help in the first place. Frontline workers often feel overwhelmed and overworked. Initially, they feel defeated which can in turn lead to feeling desensitized to the people they serve (as a coping mechanism). Being shuffled around makes your sense of self-worth even lower and makes you feel like you have no control.

OPPORTUNITIES

- *How might we simplify and streamline the experience for families?*
- *How might we better integrate funding, programs and services in order to provide a more holistic and supported interaction with social services?*
- *How might we ensure our frontline workers have the time and resources they need to competently support the whole family?*
- *How might we develop different metrics of success that value and reward relationship building?*

CALL TO ACTION

Learn together. We understand that given the complexity of our systems, we cannot know all the answers. We say when we don’t know and invite others to help us figure it out.

Value people over paperwork. While we understand the deep value of quantitative data and predictive metrics, it must be balanced with a focus on the power of the human story and individual experience. We believe that relationships and people matter most and our actions should reflect that.



Stories from the Field

PRESCHOOL

Mary, her 3 year old daughter, Annie, and her 7 year old son, Ben, live downtown. Her daughter is enrolled in Head Start and her son attends the local elementary school. She has been working at the nearby CVS store for 18 months but knows that there isn't an opportunity to earn much more than she's making now (\$9.50 an hour).

Mary and her children live in public housing. She relies on food stamps and free childcare through Head Start to make ends meet. All of these things require ongoing paperwork. Even with Mary's attention to detail, things come up. Last week she spent two hours waiting in Tanya's office (one of her social workers) only to discover that she missed the deadline for food stamps this month and would have to figure out another way to feed the family. In addition, Tanya explained that since she was out with her sick child last week, she's fallen further behind on her heavy caseload. Tanya apologized to Mary for not having time to know the deadline change. Mary left the office frustrated.

There are other complexities in Mary's life. Her son Ben requires special care to manage and monitor his behavior. At least once a week, she gets a call from his teacher. Ever changing medications require frequent doctor's appointments and more paperwork.

Recently one of Mary's other social workers mentioned a new career pathway program at the local community college that prepares women for careers in healthcare. She heard that jobs can pay as much as \$13 an hour. But she's not sure she can meet the physical demands of the job, let alone the work and school schedule while juggling her two children on her own.

OTHER EXAMPLES

- The relational work of front-line workers is undervalued relative to the 'paper-pushing' work that is the focus of metrics.
- Without strategic planning, changes in policy and practices, while well-intentioned, add more burden to already overwhelmed staff. This deeply affects organizational culture, turnover and essentially the outcome of the work itself.
- **What's working:** Two organizations that are located down the street from one another both empower individuals to rise above their barriers and achieve employment. In order to avoid duplication of efforts, they met and learned that they each bring something different to the table: one provides personal supports and employer connections while the other offers educational training that leads to career opportunities. They decided to go beyond referring clients to one another and form an integrated partnership. Clients now have direct access to their combined services through one employee, which ensures no duplication, and more importantly, a better experience for their clients.



As a leader, it's hard for me to face my overworked staff and say here's one more new change that's intended to make things better—but actually **I know it will make their jobs harder.**

GIVE ROOM TO HEAL

Consider my whole self,
including my trauma
and history.



5. GIVE ROOM TO HEAL

Consider my whole self, including my trauma and history.

SOURCE OF TENSION

Problems can't be fixed without getting to the root of them. There are few opportunities in our current social sector to both identify and address unresolved trauma such as neglect, physical and sexual abuse and domestic violence. When we do not solve for the underlying cause of trauma, efforts can be superficial, misguided or fruitless. The focus on “band-aid” solutions often deepens the wounds and prolongs the healing process.

MOTIVATION

People need to feel safe and secure in order to move forward.

OPPORTUNITIES

- *How might we move beyond individualized, clinical responses to community-wide responses?*
- *How might we move from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”*
- *How might we acknowledge trauma and address its root causes to ensure that solutions are effective?*
- *How might we instill empathy into our services to care for the whole person?*
- *How might we coordinate our services so that critical information can be shared to inform response efforts?*
- *How might we offer more preventative solutions that stop trauma before it happens?*



CALL TO ACTION

Embrace our Complexity.

We occupy multiple identities that lead to varied lived experiences and relationships to power. A woman can experience privilege in her whiteness and discrimination in her gender; privilege in her religion and discrimination in her class. In other words, our identities are complex and intersectional. We must recognize this in ourselves and in others so that we can empathize and connect in order to create change together.

Challenge our own biases and refuse to pass them down.

We know that we all carry biases towards other groups, but we refuse to pass on these stereotypes to our next generation.

Acknowledge our interventions can both help and hurt. We understand the role our systems play in institutionalized oppression and the impact of that on communities. We cannot be afraid to redesign our own frameworks—whether that be different funding structures, providing childcare, adjusting meeting times and locations, consolidating services and/or putting resources toward sustained community leadership development.

Create space for pain. We know our histories carry pain and are a defining factor in shaping our present and our future. Without holding space to heal, we can't move forward.

Stories from the Field

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Jennifer and her six-year-old son, Jeremy, recently moved out of a shelter and into an apartment. A few weeks after they moved, someone was murdered on their front curb. She and her son both heard the gunshots right outside their living room window and had to deal with the police in their front yard for hours. On one hand, their presence made her feel safer but on the other she didn't like how they questioned her older son. After the incident, Jeremy had terrible nightmares. He kept getting into trouble at school. Eventually, doctors started treating him for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Jennifer decided to move her son to another school because of how the teachers and administrators were treating him. Meanwhile, no helping professional was aware of what happened in Jeremy's life.

Looking back, Chris had a hard time in school. He wasn't a good student and really struggled with his peers because he never fit in. His parents never had time to engage the school and also disliked school themselves. His

memories of school are negative and he often swears he'd never redo those years. Still, he made it through and was so proud to earn his GED. Now as a dad, he wants to support his kids in school, but it's been hard. Even just showing up to their school brings back difficult memories, so parent-teacher conferences are the worst. When he tries to help his daughter with homework, it's like he has a block. He senses that she is starting to pick up on his anxiety because she's growing more and more uninterested in school. He isn't sure what to do.

Marisol, a mother who recently immigrated here from Guatemala, was warned about a group of black men who dealt drugs at a nearby park. A few weeks ago, one of the men robbed her at gunpoint. She couldn't report it because she feared she and her husband would be deported and separated from her children. Now she makes sure her family avoids groups of black men and warns her children to protect themselves from "those kind of people."

OTHER EXAMPLES

- Gender-based violence can lead to a loss of housing, barriers to employment, lack of transportation and isolation. Rarely do solutions recognize this root cause.
- Feelings of safety and security often clash in the black community. There is a history of racist police brutality that results in distrust, risk and insecurity for black men and teens. However, police presence can also make some (e.g. newcomers, black mothers) feel more secure in high-violence communities; leading to a sense of "I need you but I fear you."
- One woman's childhood abuse and traumatic experience in foster care led to a cycle of family violence, with her own children being placed in foster care. Drugs, prostitution and criminal charges pose additional barriers for her as she tries to get back on track.
- Many community churches provide a space for healing and support for their members, particularly after acts of violence have occurred in the community.



I need you **but I fear you.**

KEEP PROMISES

Show up every time.
Deliver on your word.



6. KEEP PROMISES

Show up every time. Deliver on your word.

SOURCE OF TENSION

People have been let down by the those promising to help, resulting in a lack of trust. This lack of trust leads to disengagement. There are two types of trust: relational and transactional. Relational trust is earned through shared experiences and backgrounds. Transactional trust is earned through consistent interactions that involve various degrees of give and take.

Both are required to fully engage the community. Service providers in outsider positions often don't have relational trust with communities they serve. However, they can leverage earned transactional trust to engage community members. Service providers in insider positions often have relational trust. However, if they fail to respect the give-and-take of transactional trust, their broken promises leave community members feeling used.

MOTIVATION

Being able to trust in others is foundational to feeling secure in our world.

Trust is an essential component to driving meaningful interaction, and thereby engagement, with community members.

OPPORTUNITIES

- *How might we use transactional trust to build relational trust with community members?*
- *How might we use reliable interactions and open communication in order to build the relationships and connection that drive action?*

CALL TO ACTION

Build trust. Stick around.

Ask ourselves: "Are we a reliable and constant presence in the lives of those we serve? Are our interactions predictable and consistent? Can others count on us to show up and stay connected? Do we backup our promises with action?" This is how we build trust.



Stories from the Field

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Gina just moved to her neighborhood two years ago. She has a seven year-old daughter and is pregnant with her second child. When she moved, she wanted to get connected in her community and heard that if you want to get connected, Sunny was the person to know. Sunny was born and raised in the neighborhood and was elected as city council member, with promises to bring jobs and safety to their community. Gina volunteered for his city council campaign and loved getting to know other community members. She believed in Sunny's platform and hoped for change. Now, she sees him show up to ribbon-cutting ceremonies and big events in the community but is still waiting to see action on the progress he promised. She's starting to wonder if he'll follow through.

On the other hand, Jen is a home healthcare worker and has been visiting Gina at home throughout her pregnancy. At first, Gina was pretty guarded around Jen—she seemed so different from her and so how could Jen ever relate to what Gina was going through? However, Jen shows up. She

does what she says she's going to do. She asks questions and offers options and follows through. Gina has learned to trust Jen and has opened up to her more than she ever thought she might. Slowly, Jen feels like more than just a home healthcare worker.

As Gina looks to find examples of how to get involved in her community—particularly as someone new to the neighborhood—she thinks of Nicole. Ten years ago, Nicole was recruited by teachers at her kids' elementary school to be part of the PTO. As a member, Nicole has been an advocate for her community. She successfully helped expand her children's after-school program so more children—like Gina's daughter—receive homework help and are exposed to arts, music and sports programs not available during regular school hours. She also goes door-to-door telling parents in the community about other activities for kids. Nicole wasn't born and raised in the neighborhood and her kids have moved on to high school, but her commitment to the school community continues.

OTHER EXAMPLES

- Long-term support can't be built by offering help at the most obvious time; it's important to maintain contact with individuals.
- Mothers complain that they can't rely on anyone else even though others rely on them. "I can't trust nobody but myself."
- Older children often act as the family's interpreter when interacting with services. Some families don't trust interpreters they don't know because they feel they don't accurately communicate what they want.
- "I want to connect with someone who's been through it like me, because they understand what it's like to struggle and will accept me as I am." These "people like me" are who folks turn to in order to navigate social services and life decisions.
- **What's working:** Some managers/leaders work hard to communicate openly and share information with employees. These leaders are trusted and respected, not only by their direct supervisees, but across the work area.



My only thing is I want to see things being done. They've heard so much about what we want and what we need for our communities and families but yet **I still haven't seen any changes to improve anything** we've been speaking on.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our hope is that this report represents the beginning of a new dialogue and set of practices aimed at social change. The call to create equity is an urgent one. Based on our work represented in this report, Design Impact has already been compelled to act. We know we must start with ourselves and so have operationalized the calls to action to ensure that these are integrated into the very fiber of who we are and how we operate.

For example, we have re-invested in our organizational leadership development initiative, DI LEAD, as a mechanism that fosters critical reflection of our practice and the development of new competencies related to inclusion and creative change-making. We have designed a model ladder of citizen engagement that will drive ongoing efforts to empower community leadership in our work.

We are launching a community of practice in hopes of creating space for us to continue to learn and grow with others in shared commitment and accountability to the work of equity and inclusion. Possible next steps include creating outcomes based on these calls to action to help us measure how we're doing; considering ways to invest resources to bringing these alive in our work; and exploring how to speak to this as a central driving force in all we do.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

We hope that this report inspires you to move beyond words to action. Below are several, immediate steps you can take:

- Host a brainstorming session on how to incorporate one or more metatheme(s) into a current project or initiative
- Immerse yourself in the literature on implicit bias, equity, and intersectionality
- Critically reflect on your own practice, based on the metatheme and calls to action
- Engage your leadership around these calls to action

Lastly, and most importantly: do this work with people who are traditionally excluded from these conversations and be willing to share power, so that we might bring about meaningful social change in our communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible by generous funding and support from **United Way of Greater Cincinnati**.

We are also eternally grateful to all of those who have lent their expertise, time and energy to this report.

In particular, we'd like to thank several residents from Avondale and Price Hill in Cincinnati, OH who have been our gut check. Their dedicated assistance and input made this work better.

Finally, and most importantly, we are forever indebted to the **hundreds of community members** who continue to share their stories and raise their voices in this work.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS REPORT PLEASE CONTACT:

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APPENDIX A:

Research Methodology

RELIABILITY + VALIDITY

Our goal was to identify reliable and valid metathemes across our projects. Reliable qualitative insights are **repeated and consistent themes across multiple members of a group**. We ensured that our metathemes were reliable by first grouping similar insights within each project into themes. Then, we grouped these initial project themes into larger metathemes that showed up across several projects and social sector areas.

Valid qualitative insights get at the most honest, deep and authentic motivations, meaning and values behind human behavior. To identify valid themes, we carefully sourced our projects to pinpoint at least one project per social sector area with high-quality, human-centered insights. In other words, we pulled from projects with deep insights that spoke to human emotion and motivation—both of which drive human behavior.

Also, all of the projects sampled for this report used empathic interviewing, an in-depth interviewing technique that establishes deep connections with participants in order to produce honest and thoughtful accounts.

Ultimately, we settled on thirteen projects that included over 350 community members and frontline workers and spanned various Cincinnati neighborhoods (Bond Hill, Walnut Hills, Avondale, Price Hill, Clifton, Over The Rhine) as well as Owen County, OH; West Clermont, OH; and Northern Kentucky. We continued by compiling all the collected insights across selected projects into a developing database. This database housed those insights along with their respective social sector area and target populations. **Developing this database both supported our theming process and also stands as a prototype of an open-access archive of qualitative, community-based data.** We then themed in three rounds to surface reliable, key metathemes.

Valid qualitative insights get at the most honest, deep and authentic motivations, meaning and values behind human behavior.

THEORETICAL LENS: INTERSECTIONALITY

In addition to drawing on human-centered design as a core approach in our research process, we also drew heavily on intersectional analysis to make meaning of the data and to imagine steps forward. **Intersectionality connects lived experiences and identities to structures and systems of power—essential in getting at the root of poverty and creating equity.** The term was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how race and gender intersect in the lives of black women. Building on the work of Crenshaw and other Black feminist scholars and activists, intersectionality has broadened to include other social categories including class, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and ability.

An intersectional approach appreciates that people occupy multiple identities, which translates into rich experiences of both marginalization and privilege.

As such, intersectionality helps to highlight the marginalization and privilege existing within groups. For example, when understanding the gender wage gap, often times it is cited that women make 78% of what men make. However, this statistic does not accurately represent the problem. This

statistic is true for some white women and white men. When race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, level of education and geography are factored in, there are further disparities that play out. For instance, compared to white men, African-American women make 64% and Latina women earn 54%. To solve for wage equity—and all equity—an intersectional approach is critical.

Intersectionality also acknowledges that these lived experiences are influenced by larger social structures consisting of institutions (e.g. family, education, criminal justice) and norms (i.e. the rules by which groups relate to one another in society). The problem is that the most dominant social structures aren't democratically shaped by all in our society. **Intersectionality helps uncover the complex ways power operates and how racism, sexism, classism and other interlocking systems of oppression work together as a driving force within these larger social structures.** Therefore, we used intersectionality as a theoretical lens to make meaning of our data and as a practical approach to develop a roadmap for an equitable future.

This project was generously funded and supported by United Way of Greater Cincinnati.



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